

THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

HEBREWS 11

Years ago my son, Mack, and I visited the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, NY. The museum shines the spotlight on 342 members who made a memorable contribution to the sport of baseball's 177 year history.

The game's all-time greats are enshrined in the Hall of Fame. *And what a fun day Mack and I had touring...*

But, today you and I are will be touring **the Bible's Hall of Faith**. Hebrews 11 spotlights the OT's great examples of belief. This morning we'll walk with the giants of faith, *and pray that their faith rubs off on us.*

The writer begins by defining faith. Verse 1, **"Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."** The Christian life is full of blessing. Ephesians 1:3 tells us we've been **"blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ."**

Yet according to Ephesians our blessings are **"spiritual"** and **"heavenly"** - and for physical, tactile, earthbound people that makes them ethereal or hard to grasp. Here's our dilemma - the blessings we have in Christ are *spiritual* and *eternal*, whereas we occupy a *physical body* and are confined to a *temporal world*.

We're use to interacting with our surroundings through our five senses. Yet spiritual blessings can't be touched, or tasted, or smelled, or seen, or heard...

But God has an answer to our problem... **It's faith!** **"Faith is the substance of things hoped for..."** Faith brings substance and texture to spiritual and whispery realities. Faith is the handle. By faith we can grab hold of God's love, power, peace - and truly possess them.

Ever have trouble opening a jar? Just get a textured rag or towel, wrap it around the slick top, and the rag enables you to grip it, and apply the torque needed to twist it off. This is what faith does. **It produces spiritual torque. It's the way to get a grip on God's blessings.**

Faith is the sixth sense that perceives the spiritual and eternal. As Oswald Sanders puts it, **"Faith enables the believing soul to treat the future as present and the invisible as seen."** Faith alerts us to the spiritual traffic around us. It opens our eyes to God's work in our lives.

Think of faith as the bobber on a fishing line. It sits on top of the water. With your eyes, you can't tell what's going on under the surface, but when you see that bobber plunge you know you've hooked a fish.

And faith is like a fishing bobber, it alerts you to the invisible realities that are on the other end of the line.

Verse 2, **“For by it the elders obtained a good testimony.”** Realize, the impact this passage had on the Hebrew believers to whom it was sent. When they left the institutions of Judaism, to trust Jesus as their Messiah, they were accused by their friends, and family, and rabbis of abandoning their Jewish roots.

Yet here they're assured that a life of faith is *a hallmark* of Jewish heritage, *not a departure*. All the great Hebrew heroes gained God's approval not by good works or religious deeds, but always **by faith**.

Verse 3, **“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”** Astronomers today theorize that 95% of the matter in the universe is invisible. Outer space is made up of far more than what meets the human eye.

The universe we live in is *unimaginably large*, but it's also *infinitesimally small*. At first we discovered the molecule; then the smaller atom; then smaller the electron and proton. Today, scientists talk of even smaller particles like *quarks, gluons, photons, neutrinos, leptons, bosons*. Yet the writer of Hebrews was ahead of science. He says here, **“the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible.”**

And whether great or small everything that God created began with His Word... Verse 3 says it clearly, **“the worlds were framed by the word of God.”**

Thus, **you can't have faith in God without faith in His Word**. Once, the famous missionary to China, Hudson Taylor, wrote a letter to a supporter. In it he boasted of his abundance, **“We have 25 cents and all the promises of God!”** Maybe that's how you feel today. But *God's work* always begins with faith in *His Word*. **Real faith believes it to be true, because God said so.**

As the writer says, **“the worlds were framed by the word of God...”** This word translated **“worlds”** can mean **“ages or periods.”** Both the *physical universe* and the *history of mankind* were both formed by God's Word.

God has an unfolding plan. History is not random. *History* is **“His Story.”** The cornerstone of faith is the realization that God controls world events - *even our events* - and it all climaxes in the kingdom of His Son. Everyone in this Hall of Faith looked for that kingdom.

Have you ever said to someone, “Let me show you how that’s done.” *Of course you have! We all have...*

At times the best *explanation* is a *demonstration*. It’s better to **show** a person how it’s done, than it is to **tell them**. Some lessons are **better caught than taught**.

And this is true of faith. Warren Wiersbe writes, “The best way for faith to grow is to **walk with the faithful**.”

And the author of Hebrews would agree. For the rest of Chapter 11 he encourages the faith of his readers by pointing to people who *lived by* and *continued in* faith.

And he starts, “By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; and through it he being dead still speaks.”

Understand, **true faith always responds to God on His terms, not ours**. Both Adam’s two sons offered a sacrifice... Abel *went to his flocks* and slaughtered a lamb. Cain *went to his fields* and brought a fruit basket.

But Abel offered the “*more excellent sacrifice*” because his offering was the sacrifice God desired.

Remember when Adam and Eve sinned they covered themselves with fig leaves. It turned out to be an ironic twist. Handle a fig leaf and you’ll find out how itchy and scratchy it is... *God is much more merciful*.

Instead of fig leaves, He clothed the fallen family in soft lamb skins. But since animals don’t usually give up their pelts voluntarily that necessitated the killing of a lamb. God was teaching us “*the wages of sin is death*.”

It’s hypothesized when God rejected Cain’s sacrifice he was 129 years old. He’d been offering lambs 100-plus years - *he knew better*. But pride got the best of him. Cain tried to substitute *the work of his hands* for *the blood of a lamb*. And God rejected his offering.

When Cain laid his crops on the altar I’ll bet he was humming the Frank Sinatra tune, “*I Did It My Way*.” But you don’t come to God “**your way**.” If you truly love God you’ll love Him the way He wants to be loved, not just what’s convenient for you. People today believe God will forgive you as long as you’re sincere. *Your understanding of God and the details of your faith don’t matter - but that’s not true*. Faith isn’t me striking a deal of my own liking with God. It’s accepting God’s terms.

“By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, and was not found, because God had taken him”; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he

pleased God.” Enoch experience what all Christians hope to one day. He was **raptured.**

One evening after dinner Ole Enoch told the Mrs. he was taking the dog for a walk, and never came back.

Enoch made such a habit of **“walking with God”** - *of simply enjoying God’s presence* - that on this occasion he ended up closer to God’s house than his, and God took him home. *Enoch pleased God because of faith.*

For verse 6 tells us, **“But without faith it is impossible to please Him...”** This is the theme of the whole chapter. The only way to gain God’s favor is by faith.

And here’s what constitutes true faith, **“for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”** Sincere faith *believes God exists - and expects God to bless.*

“Faith is God-ward expectation!”

When my daughter, Natalie, was little, she’d gaze up at me with those big blue eyes, and ask, **“Daddy, I want some ice cream.”** I’d recall she hadn’t eaten her dinner, and it was just before bedtime, and another parent had already said **“no.”** So I’d say, **“Ok Princess, let’s get you some ice cream.”** With my little girl *I was a soft touch!*

And so is God with His kids. God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, **but you have to seek!**

Verse 7, **“By faith Noah being divinely warned of things not yet seen...”** Prior to Noah the Earth was watered by a heavy dew. It had never actually rained.

At the time the Earth had *a different eco-system, but the same cynicism.* Imagine, the cable news reporters grilling Noah as to why he was building an enormous boat. They mocked and ridiculed him. I’m sure Noah’s Ark became fodder for the late night talk show hosts.

Noah reminds us that *faith is never popular.*

Noah was *unmoved* by the criticism, because he was **“moved with godly fear...”** Noah cared about God’s approval, more than he did his reputation among men.

So despite the public scorn for his project, he **“prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”** A faith-filled Noah built an Ark and preached impending judgment.

Faith hears what other people don’t. It’s privy to information other people lack. Faith is often laughed at... *but remember it was Noah who got the last laugh.*

And “By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” Abraham comes home one night and says to his wife, Sarah, “Honey, pack up we’re moving.” She replies, “But Abe, where are we going?” And Abraham answers, “Trust me, when God tells me, you’ll be the first to know.” *Imagine, the discussion that ensued.*

Noah *believed without seeing*. Abraham *believed without knowing*. And the latter *may be more difficult*.

I don’t have to see as long as God tells me what’s going on. It’s when God conceals the details... when I’m expected to *trust Him* where I can’t *trace Him*. It’s when I don’t have all the facts that my faith gets tested!

Too many of us are addicted to details. We demand to know *why!* But faith turns the letter “y” into “o.” **You don’t need to know why, when you’re sure of Who!**

Verse 9, “By faith (Abraham) dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise; for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God.”

Author Kent Hughes helps us think of Abraham’s faith in modern day terms, “Imagine, God promising you and your descendants the land of Guatemala, and in obedience you travel there and live for the rest of your life in your camper, along with your sons’ families in their campers, moving from place to place. You remain an alien for the remainder of your sojourn, without full citizenship rights, a perpetual outsider.”

Abraham was given a land he never fully possessed. *And he was okay with that...* For he was actually looking for a heavenly home. Abraham realized that in this life, like all of us, he was merely passing through.

We’re foolish to make too much of earthly stuff. What you and I can actually control is minimal. *Control is an illusion*. So much of what we trust in falls under the category, “*here today and gone tomorrow.*” A wise man keeps his eyes on his ultimate, eternal destination!

“By faith Sarah herself also received strength to conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised.” Abraham was 100 years old, and Sarah an unbelievable 90, when she birthed the promised child.

They were the first couple in history to qualify for a senior discount on their labor and delivery expenses. It was by faith. ***Sarah conceived because she believed!***

And perhaps God wants to do a miracle of new life in you. You're weak and weary - you need strength - *then receive it by faith!* Have you "*judged Him faithful who promised.*" Do you have a God-ward expectation?

"Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead..." *What an assault on the ole boy's male ego!* The writer says his libido was "*as good as dead.*" Not even Viagra could help him. He was beyond hope. **Yet God gave him strength.** And from Abraham "*were born as many as the stars of the sky in multitude - innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore.*"

Verse 13, "*These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*" This is what faith enables a person to do - **to see what's afar off, embrace it; then use it on a challenge that's up close. To take the far off and apply it to the up close!**

"For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return." Faith refuses to dwell in the past. Its focus is **forward not backward.**

"But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them." People of faith live for eternity. They evaluate situations, and adopt values, and make decisions - from a forever perspective... **Heaven is the motherland of faith!**

Perhaps you heard the story of pioneer missionary, Henry Morrison. Henry was returning to the states after forty years in Africa. On board the same boat was the US President, Teddy Roosevelt, returning from a safari.

When the boat docked in New York harbor a huge reception greeted the President. Morrison exited the boat alone, and dejected. After all, he'd just spent forty years serving the Lord, and now on his return home no one seemed to care. But as he was getting off the boat the Lord reminded him, "**Henry, you're not home yet.**"

We all should remind ourselves of this same truth. *This world is not our home!* **We're not home yet!**

Verse 17, "**By faith Abraham, when he was tested...**" And **God always puts faith to the test!** He promised Abraham and Sarah a son: then waited 25 years to work the miracle. *And their faith would be tested again.*

For years after his son arrives, God tells Abraham to “offer up Isaac, and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son...” He passed God’s test, but it was more complicated than first thought!

The writer quotes Genesis 21:12, “of whom it was said, “In Isaac your seed shall be called...” God had promised Abraham he would sire a great nation *through Isaac*, that would give birth to the Messiah, the Deliverer of salvation... *So if he sacrifices Isaac where will he get his grandsons - the Messiah’s forbearers?*

What God is commanding Abraham defied logic. The future of a nation - and the promise of God’s salvation for all mankind - rode on this man’s expression of faith.

The words written in verse 17 are so simple, “*when he was tested, offered up Isaac...*” But they hardly do justice to the reality of Abraham’s unquestioning faith...

Genesis 22:3 tells us the day after God’s command came, “Abraham rose early in the morning and saddled his donkey...” It was the very next day, *early in the morning no less*. There was no stalling, no hesitation, no arguing with God over the matter... he just obeyed.

I hope my faith never gets tested to this extreme. *What would you do if God told you to offer up your only son as a sacrifice? We know what Abraham did...*

He took Isaac to the appointed place, strapped him to the altar, and raised a knife above his throat... *How could he sacrifice the embodiment of all his hopes?*

Verse 19, “concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead...” The Greek term translated “concluding” is a mathematical word. It means “to calculate.” Abe was mathematical in his deliberations.

Often Christians are accused of having “blind faith” or “faith that denies logic” - *but no so*. Our faith is a reasonable faith. It just adds God into our calculations.

Abraham reasoned the situation out. God gave him a son. Isaac was essential to the fulfillment of God’s plan. Yet, Abe was certain God had told him to sacrifice his son... *God must be planning to raise Isaac from the dead!* There had never been a resurrection to this point, yet Abraham figured God would perform the first.

Again verse 19, “from which he also received him in a figurative sense.” And here, the plot thickens. God never allowed Abraham to actually lay a knife on Isaac, but in his heart Abraham sacrificed his only son. And in so doing, it brought Abraham into a deep communion with God. Abraham starred in the drama of the ages...

For 2000 years later, the Father God, offered His only Son, Jesus, on the same spot Abraham offered Isaac... On our Israel tours we visit Skull Hill; the site of Jesus’

crucifixion - and the garden tomb, where His body was buried. ***And I've checked it... it's empty!***

Abraham's faith in resurrection, was ultimately fulfilled by Jesus. Which means *the eventual test of faith is on us - do we trust in the cross of Jesus and in His resurrection for a forgiven and transformed life?*

Verse 20, **"By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come."** This too was amazing faith! Jacob stole Esau's birthright by impersonating him, and fooling his nearly-blind father, Isaac. *It was a con job. A terrible deed. Yet Isaac let it stand.* Even in an act of deception Isaac saw God's providence at work. **"By faith"** Isaac stood by the hijacked blessing. **Faith can see God's hand even in man's injustices.**

"By faith Jacob, when he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." Here was another incredible act of faith. Jacob sensed his grandsons' destiny. As in his life, he realized the younger son would supersede his older brother. So when it came time to bestow the blessing, **by faith** Jacob swapped hands, and blessed Ephraim over Manasseh. It was a shocking violation of societal norms. Yet Jacob knew **God's will trumps tradition.**

Joseph also demonstrated faith. **"By faith Joseph, when he was dying, made mention of the departure of the children of Israel, and gave instructions concerning his bones."** Joseph knew God's Word, and that Israel's future was in the Land of Promise. So by faith, he gave his family instructions to bury him back in that land.

And Joseph's faith was vindicated, 400 years later, when Moses led the Hebrews out of Egypt they took with them the bones of Joseph to bury in Canaan.

The faith of all four Hebrew forefathers - *Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph* - proved that faith isn't blind faith. It actually sees further. The man of faith doesn't see less than other people see. He indeed, *sees more.*

Verse 23, **"By faith Moses, when he was born, was hidden three months by his parents, because they saw he was a beautiful child; and they were not afraid of the king's command."** Here's some *parental faith* in action!

Jewish historian, Josephus, tells us, **"One of Egypt's sacred scribes, who was very discerning in foretelling future events truly, told the king, that about this time there would be a child born to the Israelites, who if he were reared, would bring the Egyptian dominion low, and would raise the Israelites."** In reaction the Pharaoh ordered all Hebrew male babies to be put to death.

Yet he didn't plan on the faith of two parents. They put Moses in a basket and floated him down the Nile. Moses was found and adopted by Pharaoh's daughter.

And there comes a point for every parent, *where like Moses' parents*, we send our adult child out on the river of life, and trust God to guide them where we can't go.

“By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter...” It's hard to imagine the advantages afforded Moses as a member of the Egyptian dynasty. His wealth was inexhaustible.

Yet with the riches of the world at his fingertips, Moses **“chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin...”**

Somehow Moses was able to see through the vanity of Egyptian culture and the foolishness of their idolatry. In contrast to Egyptian emptiness, Moses saw the Hebrews joyful even in distress. He was willing to suffer momentarily, to lay claim to an eternal God.

Notice, Moses swapped **“the passing pleasures of sin”** to identify with God's people. Hey, *sin is pleasurable. If it weren't, it wouldn't be tempting.* But its pleasure is passing - it's **“here today, gone tomorrow.”** And how quickly the **“pleasure of sin”** can turn to *pain.*

It reminds me of how an eskimo kills a wolf. They dip a knife in blood and freeze it - for a wolf it makes for a tasty popsicle. It licks away the blood, until its tongue gets to the blade of the knife. By this time it's so use to the taste of blood, the wolf doesn't know it's tasting its own blood. And it dies. This is the trap sprung by sin.

At first sin tastes good. It's a lot of fun. But at some point - *and the problem is, it's not always detectable to you* - your pleasure ends and your destruction begins.

Sin looks inviting until it's compared to God's blessing. As Moses did, **“esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.”** Moses knew in the long run, he was better off *suffering* for God, than *savoring* Egypt. Satan offers instant gratification, but over the long run, *hardship with Jesus* is better than *treasure in hell.*

Verse 28, **“By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them.”** God told Moses to kill a lamb and spread its blood on the door of every Hebrew home. As a result God's plague passed over houses where the blood was applied. And this is now true of Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians 5:7 Paul says that Jesus is **our Passover**. By faith His blood is sprinkled on the doors of our heart and spiritual death *passes over* our lives.

“By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned.” With their back to the sea, and their face toward the attacking Egyptian army, the Hebrews had nowhere to go... *but up!* Moses trusted God, and God worked a miracle. The Red Sea parted before him!

And note the charitable recounting of this story, “*by faith Israel passed through the Red Sea.*” Read the story in Exodus, and very few Israelites had faith. All but Moses doubted and wanted to return to Egypt.

Yet, this is the flavor of the chapter. Every member of the Hall of Faith doesn't always act like they belong. **Noah** got drunk. **Abraham** succumb to fear and lied. **Sarah** laughed at God. Yet God commends each one of them for their faith, and refuses to recall their lapses.

This is the wonder of our salvation! Chapter 10 told us, “The just shall live by faith!” It's faith, not our own good works, that make us right with God. God treats us as if we'd never sinned even when we do... **by faith.**

Now the writer starts to scroll rapidly through history noting example after example of people who pleased God **by faith**... Verse 30, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.”

This may've been the greatest example of collective faith in all of the OT. Israel's army followed the strange battle plan God gave to General Joshua. On the seventh day the priests circled the walls seven times, blew their trumpets, and the city's walls collapsed!

“By faith the harlot Rahab did not perish with those who did not believe, when she had received the spies with peace.” As a harlot, Rahab spoke to her share of strangers, and she'd heard of the Hebrews, and how God delivered them from Egypt. Thus, when two of their spies seek shelter at her house, she cooperates.

Rahab was a shady lady, but she was nobody's fool. She figured Israel's God was the true God - and due to her faith, as I'll-informed and undeveloped as it was, she threw in her lot with the Hebrews. It was because of that faith she reaped the rewards of their victory.

Verse 32, “And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah, also of David and Samuel and the prophets: who through faith subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions...” An obvious reference to Daniel.

Here he just reels off, rapid-fire examples of faith that we could study for months. The point is *anybody* who ever became a *somebody* with God, **did so by faith!**

Verse 34, faith even “quenched the violence of fire...” A reference to Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. The Hebrews who refused to bow to the king’s idol.

Men of faith “escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again...” The raising of the dead refers to the miracles of Elijah and Elisha!

Yet notice, in every case, faith is never *passive*, but *active*. All the people mentioned are action figures. They acted on what they believed. By faith *battles are won, kingdoms conquered, even the dead are raised*. Faith isn’t lethargic - even when faith waits it’s always reaching, and stretching, and on the move for God!

And faith not only does, it endures. Verse 35, “Others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection.” Believers under the threat of torture or death could’ve denounced Christ to escape danger, but their eyes were fixed on heaven!

“Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.” Remember, Jeremiah was chained and thrown into a pit of sludge. The point here is that faith didn’t always insure your deliverance. In fact, at times it seals your persecution.

Verse 37, “They were stoned...” This was the plight of the Prophet Zechariah. And “They were sawn in two...” There’s a non-biblical book, “The Ascension of Isaiah.” It has a passage that tells us false prophets took Isaiah while still alive and sawed him in half. The book says that as they cut into the prophet’s body, *and I quote*, “He neither cried aloud nor wept, but his lips spake with the Holy Spirit.” He endured by faith... Of course, later he was diagnosed with *a split personality*.

Others “Were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy.” These were citizens of heaven.

These people of faith were on loan to this world as a witness to God. Yet they were never appreciated. *If you live by faith, don’t expect to be popular with this world.*

“They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth.” Apparently, their faith didn’t produce lives of “health and wealth.” To the contrary, their faith produced suffering, poverty, and banishment.

Verse 39, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise...”

And here's the common denominator with everyone in God's Hall of Faith - they exhibited faith without realizing its ultimate fulfillment. Great faith means much to God, but it receives little in terms of present, earthly compensation. Faith's hope went largely unrealized. These people received a foretaste, but no one cashed in. Everyone on this list had to wait! And the reason is amazing. *Verse 40 will blow you away...*

“God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” The members of the OT's Hall Of Faith were content with **the promise** of salvation. They longed to be forgiven, and changed from the inside out, and have total access to God; yet they settled for stop-gap measures.

Animal sacrifices earned for them a probation, but not quite a pardon... **The Law of Moses** was in their hands, but not in their heart... They were represented before God by **a human priesthood**, despite the fact they had no personal access to God themselves...

These men and women of faith were waiting for a new covenant, while living under the old. *And the writer of this letter says they were waiting on us!* The new and better way the Hebrews had been promised wasn't just for Israel, but for all people including us today. God wanted to add you and me to His family of faith!

God's desire is for us to also learn to walk by faith! And faith begins with expectation. Do you believe God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him? *If so, turn from your sin and turn to His Son*, and then seek the Lord with all your heart. You'll find Him!